

Market-driven Creativity Part 1

AUDIO SEMINAR TRANSCRIPT

Tara Gentile: Hi everyone, thanks so much for being a part of The Creative Empire, I'm Tara Gentile here with Megan Auman. Today's first seminar is the first part of a three part series on Market-driven Creativity.

This is a topic that Megan and I are both very passionate about and we believe it's what separates starving artists from real creative entrepreneurs. Today we're going to be talking about the aspect of creative voice - how you find it, what you do with it once you've got it, and how you can use that to start getting the most out of your creative business.

So Megan, just to start off, can you refresh us on what exactly what we believe market driven creativity means?

Megan Auman: Absolutely. Market driven creativity means creating products that reflect the needs and desires of the market while staying true to your own creative vision. I think that the challenge a lot of us find is that we tend to swing far to one direction or far to the other.

So you have maybe the artist or the designer who says "I'm going to make what I want to make, who cares about the market, it doesn't matter." And then the you have the opposite, someone who's like, "Okay, this is what's going on in the market and so I'm going to make the exact same thing because this is selling. So if I make the exact same thing I'll sell too."

And I don't think either one is really the path to success. If you are only following what you want to do and never paying attention to the market, you'll probably end up as that starving artist because you're not actually creating products that people want to buy. The flip side is if you are always just copying what the market wants, you're always going to be a step behind, you're never going to be the innovator.

So by employing market driven creativity, what you're doing is you're making products that people want to buy, but you're doing it with your own vision so that you're never going to feel like a sell out. So I think in a nut shell that's what market driven creativity is.

Tara Gentile: Awesome. So we discussed the first part of letting the market drive your creative vision is really figuring out what your creative voice is. Where you speak from, where you create from, and what makes that unique. So can you tell me a little bit more about how you create a voice and what that means for your business?

Megan Auman: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's very important that before you look at the market, you have a really solid idea of your creative voice. And what I mean by your creative voice is everything from your passions to your personal style to just the way you deliver your content or your products. And deliver is kind of a broad word that ranges from the way you write on your blog to the way you paint a picture or the way you sew clothes or things like that.

And I think that ultimately you need to start with that creative voice because that what's going to keep you from jumping on the band wagon. It's what's going to make your products unique and distinctive. I'll say that as we're kind of working through this that Tara and I have also created a worksheet for you guys which you'll be able to download as well and some of the things we'll talk about here are on the worksheet.

So I guess we'll maybe kind of walk through some of the steps to developing your creative voice, what do you think, Tara?

Tara Gentile: Sure, sounds good to me.

Megan Auman: Alright, the first thing that I would say that you want to do when it comes to developing your creative voice is just to identify your influences. To look at what makes you tick. This is actually the first exercise on our worksheet, because your creative voice is always going to be shaped by the people and the places and things and experiences that have influenced you. So you need to look back and figure out what's most important to you.

Tara, how have you gone about figuring out what your influences are?

Tara Gentile: Well, for me, coming from the writing side of the creative spectrum. The way I identify my influences and let them guide me is just by kind of absorbing them every day. So for me it's making sure that I find the blogs or the books or the magazine articles or the newspaper articles that aren't just things are in my wheel house or directly in my niche, but finding people who I really identify with their style.

So for me it's a writer like [Kelly Diels](#) or a writer like [Danielle LaPorte](#) and kind of allowing myself to soak in their writing style and the way they view the world and kind of working with those influences in my own writing. As far as my kind of business voice goes, I think I look at other business owners who I admire and kind of do the same thing; I read what they're writing. I talk to them and network with them. I allow their ideas to kind of meld to mine and always view my next steps through that kind of lens.

Megan Auman: Yeah and I think your point about looking at things outside of your wheel house, as you called it is, a really important one when you're thinking about your influences. When I was in graduate school all my professors, when we had critiques, would ask us "What are you looking at?" all the time.

It was one of their favorite questions and the accepted answer was that you were looking at things beyond your field. So you weren't just looking at what other jewelers were making or what other glass blowers were making. You were looking at much broader influences and I would say looking at, listening to, and reading, all of those things.

I think it's important then not only that you can identify what your influences are but you can identify what about them speaks to you. So on the worksheet we have sections for you to think about not just what some of your influences are but what we really want you to do is figure out kind of what drives those influences. What are the kind of adjectives that you would use and what are the themes in those influences that come together to make your creative voice?

Tara Gentile: Right, so Megan, I'm really curious to hear what themes you find in your own influences.

Megan Auman: I'm always looking at things that are really kind of clean but impactful design. I guess I would say impactful is a pretty good theme. So we're looking at something that's a descriptor maybe, not so much the thing. So I like things that have a lot of impact that really kind of make a statement, if you will, and that's something that's actually coming out a lot in my work.

Tara Gentile: So the second exercise is all about identifying your passions and kind of understanding that your creative voice also stems from that place that you feel most passionate about. Your design as you said is impactful, what about making a statement, what about making an impact in something that, you know, gets you really excited and brings that passion into your work?

Megan Auman: Well, I think for me when I'm looking at my passion, what I'm really passionate about is, I guess I would say voicing my opinion. That's something that I realize is something that's really important for me. If you go back through and I take a broader look at the things that I'm passionate about in the last couple of years, you know, I've been making jewelry, I've been making home décor stuff, I've been writing *Crafting an MBA*. I also was doing a lot of bicycling advocacy and those are all things that I was really passionate about.

And I realize that they're all kind of things where I can express my point of view, express my opinion. And then at the same time hopefully make the world a little better. I've got these broad passions but they're all kind of about, I would say, getting out there and voicing my opinion, that sort of thing.

Tara Gentile: Awesome. I think that kind of goes right into the third exercise which is look at your previous work. As you and I have gotten to know each other a little bit better, I think you're spot on with where your influences are, where your passions are, and that really shows itself in your previous work.

For me my previous work is so all over the place, coming from a background of having a lot of formal training in music and coming from a background of having formal training in the study of religion of all things. But very similar to yours, I think that what I get passionate about is teaching and helping other people understand a different point of view.

That really informs my creative voice. So whether it's been what I'm doing now with advocating for the handmade movement or mindful spending or even just living your life more creatively and advocating for people to understand a different point of view. In that way it has reflected itself in my previous work as well in that when I was involved in religious studies there was a lot of work being done with just helping people understand that the way you've been brought up isn't the only way that people think in the world. Which of course is a difficult lesson for a college student to understand.

I think the themes that really come out in my work are that desire to help people understand what is other than themselves and I think that no matter what I am writing about or what I am talking about even on Twitter or Facebook, I hope that that is evident and I really feel like I kind of bank my business on being able to express that theme well to people.

Megan Auman: I hope that as you guys were listening to this you realize that Tara and I are pulling really big things out in this exercise. When I use to look back at the jewelry work, the metal work that I've been doing since I started in school. I use to look and I would think okay maybe my themes are that, I like to work in multiples and I like repetition or that I like organic, botanical forms and looking at those really narrow themes actually limits then what I can do.

But when I kind of go back and look the broader theme of everything that I've done, voicing my opinion, making a statement, that idea. That gives me a lot more options for expressing my creativity. So when you start you might start with these real narrow themes but we want you to encourage you to think about what are broader themes in your work that could carry over beyond media, beyond any format that you might choose.

Tara Gentile: Yeah, I think that's a really good point and at the same time though I'm a big fan of using rules and guidelines and structuring ourselves. You're completely on point but we're reaching for these really broad themes but I think narrow themes have a real benefit to us too in that we like to break rules. We give ourselves very narrow rules for what our creative voice is.

Or if we provide a box for ourselves to express ourselves, you know, to put our creativity in we're much more likely to break out of that box. Sometimes when we get into that place where we've got a broad concept we feel kind of lost. So I think that really identifying your creative voice and at all aspects and all levels of it can help you build the rules and the guidelines that you need to be able to be more innovative with your work.

Megan Auman: Well I think that's a really good point too, that there are going to be a whole range of themes that you're going to find and some of them will be more narrow and some of them will be more broad and I think it's important to explore all of those.

Tara Gentile: Exactly. Once you've got these themes down, once you've kind of identified where you're coming from and what's inspired you, and what you're really passionate about, how do we go about nailing down this creative voice? How do we go about forming this idea that people are going to know us by? I'm a big fan of the idea that constant repetition is what really kind of solidifies these ideas in our mind. So for me I think it's really kind of being really methodical about forming your creative voice.

And yes it's a form of expression, but it's also something that requires that methodology. So if you want to write, write every day. If you want to paint, paint every day. If you want to design, design every day, if you want to code, code every day. Doing something over and over again whether you feel like doing or not has a lot of power to make you grow and to stretch you and pull you and help you narrow down really what you're true voice is.

Megan Auman: Yeah and I think even if, as you're working through, let's say like the first three exercises and you haven't quite figured out what your voice is, what your major themes are, doing this daily activity, that's going to help you develop your voice because the more you do something over and over again, the more you're going to start to own it.

Just a couple months ago now, I went up to New York City to go to MOMA and see the Tim Burton Exhibition. And first of all I was just struck by the sheer volume of stuff. And the thing that I appreciated most was they had literally everything including many, many, many of Burton's drawings and paintings. Clearly this is someone who creates every day. I turned to my brother,

because I didn't have any students with me, and I have to be the teacher all the time. I turned to my brother and I was like, you know, the moral of this story is I said you need to draw every day.

Now my brother is an artist also, so it wasn't a total off comment. So I said you need to draw every day and I think when you talk about someone who has a very distinctive voice, Tim Burton is right up there. And you can tell that every day he's out there and he's turning that out and that style didn't happen over night. It happened every day with him drawing and painting and sketching and doodling and making crazy little creatures and all that stuff that he does and that's what helps him to develop his creative voice. I don't think his style would be as defined as it is if he wasn't doing that stuff day in and day out.

Tara Gentile: Right and I'm sure he looked at that as his job too, as his responsibility to his creative voice to have that same repetition. I mean for my self as a blogger I'm basically held accountable to write every day but not everyone is. And not everyone feels that kind of responsibility to their art maybe. But as a business owner, I really think that you need to have an idea that even if it's something that you're not feeling that day, that there is something to be gained in the repetition of your creativity.

Megan Auman: Yeah, I agree and I would say that if you are a person who tends to fall away from doing repetition then I would find a way to hold yourself accountable in a public forum. You know Tara and I, both of us on our blogs, we keep a pretty consistent posting schedule. So we have that kind of commitment even if we don't say overtly that we post everyday Monday through Friday, we post every day Monday through Friday.

But you can even be a little more concrete about it. A really good example is Nina Dinoff who started the [Etsy Metals Ring A Day project](#) where every day she made a ring and sometimes it was a really fully formed ring that she made in the studio and sometimes it was something that she made with trash that was laying around because she was visiting family and couldn't...and the whole point was that there never was an excuse for not creating.

But she made this a really public project, she put it on her blog, she got the rest of the Etsy Metals group involved. There are lots of people doing this, so if you aren't someone who can stick to something like that, make a commitment in that public way and I think that will help you to really push yourself.

Tara Gentile: Yeah, definitely. So we've got this broad concept of creative voice going on. And I think probably most people can see how it is important to your business. It's important to your art, whatever that might be. But how does it really pertain to your business or how do you see it in your business?

And I think where it really comes out, where your creative voice really makes itself known in your business is through your branding. I found this great quote on Entrepreneur where they say, "Simply put your brand is your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can expect from your products and services and it differentiates your offering from that of your competitors. Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be."

And I think it's so easy to stop and think that your brand is your logo or your brand is your website. I mean, I think you can cop out and say, oh my brand is me. But it's so much more than that. It's every way that you put yourself out there for your potential customer. Every way you put yourself out there to the public and I think that that's how you're creative voice manifests itself in your business.

So Megan, how do you go about forming a brand that actually reflects who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be?

Megan Auman: I think that working your way through those three ideas - who you are; who you want to be; and who people perceive you to be are all really important in putting your brand out there. I love that there's the who you are and who you want to be because I've actually been seeing a lot of posts that I've been reading online lately about branding. There are two that stick in my mind because they're from absolute opposite ends of the spectrum.

One is Holly from [Cottage Copy](#) is talking about that we have this hard time branding because we try to make it into this big deal. She's built her brand around these little details of who she is, so her tattoo and her dog and these kind of little quirks. I think that's where the first part comes in of identifying who you are. What makes you, you? What makes you tick? And not just kind of the big things but those little details that differentiate you from everybody else.

But then the flip side of that is that I also read a really great post on [Think Traffic](#) talking about Lady Gaga. And Lady Gaga is someone who built a brand on this fantasy persona. So she wasn't like this is who I am when she was...I don't even remember what her name was before she was Lady Gaga, because it's not important. She built her entire brand around being her fantasy persona, which is the idea of identifying who you want to be. So I think there is certainly room to brand with these kinds of bigger goals. I would say that you don't have to be Lady Gaga when you're thinking about identifying who you want to be, but that's certainly one approach.

But identifying who you want to be can also be about, maybe let's just say holding yourself to a higher standard. For instance who you want to be, maybe you want to be the business with insanely good customer service like Zappos. You want to be the person who answers emails within two hours, that you handle customers' complaints right away, that you, all those things. So who you want to be doesn't necessarily mean, again over the top Lady Gaga branding, it just means what do you really want out of your business?

Tara Gentile: Well, and don't you think that's the whole kind of idea behind The Creative Empire too. I mean can you honestly say that either you or I or anyone here has a real empire yet? Maybe, maybe not. But I think that that's what our goal is and that is what we're striving towards and we tell ourselves and we put out there to the public that we have an empire, that we have a business that is built to scale to as big as it can go, to understand that the sky is the limit for us.

I think that in itself is that idea of who we want to be as business owners and who we want to be as entrepreneurs.

Megan Auman: Right and I think that's really important because if we were building our brand, I guess this Creative Empire brand on who we are right now, it might be like the creative girls who work from home or something...and that's who we are right now and that's a big part of it

but you're right. We're branding this on who we want to be because I think ultimately that's what a lot of us are doing.

We have these visions for our businesses that are bigger or different or more in some ways than we are right now and I think that when you start putting that out into the universe as your brand, as your persona, that's what you will become.

Tara Gentile: Right, right, totally. Oh, I was just going to say that the last part of this is getting feedback about how others perceive you, which I think could be a very scary notion. So what suggestions do you have for getting information, getting that feedback from others to find out how they feel or how they think your brand is represented.

Megan Auman: Yeah, right and I think ultimately your brand is shaped in the mind of the customer, so no matter what you think your brand is or want your brand to be. Ultimately it's the customer that makes the decisions about your brand. Which means that you need to find ways to ask your customer. This could be in online forums, whether it's your blog or Twitter or Facebook or any of those things where you're actually asking people how they would describe you or your business or your products.

But it doesn't have to be such a big public thing. If you're a little hesitant or a little scared to do that right now. I think it's really important just to start to find people who know your business well that you can bounce ideas off of because you might say, put together promotional materials that you think completely describe your business and your brand and someone else will look at them and interpret them completely different.

So I think it's important to have that sounding board. Ideally it's someone who is also your ideal customer. Now I'm kind of lucky in that I know you very well and you happen to be a big fan of my jewelry...

Tara Gentile: I am.

Megan Auman: I know, so that just kind of works real well but that's kind of another reason maybe to become friends with some of your customers, to get to know some people, outside of maybe even your own niche. So I can ask a lot of jewelers what they think about my products but they might have some of the same biases that I do. So it's important to ask people who maybe interact with your products or services but aren't coming from the same background as you.

Tara Gentile: Yeah, yeah, I know. I think that's a great point, I mean a real turning point in my business was reaching out to other professionals who were completely outside of my niche and saying, okay, help me get to the next level. What do you see in my different brands and where I really come from. They hit my creative voice on the head even as I was kind of sitting back and not realizing what was there and what the potential or what could be so very easily and it's been a real turning point for me.

So I mean you can totally ask your customers or other people who are interacting with you in a similar way, but you can also reach out to a professional or someone else who is another creative entrepreneur but is just really other to your business. Any kind of outside help I think or outside perspective is a good one for finding out where you could be going.

Megan Auman: Yeah and I think that applies to everything that we've been talking about here. Whether it's looking back at your past work to identify themes or just talking about identifying who you are or even identifying your influences. I think it's really great to have someone or several some ones that you can bounce that stuff off of because sometimes just the act of saying it out loud to another person helps you figure out if something is working or not working or is really the direction you want to be headed in.

So I think it's really important in all of this, we'd encourage you to work through the worksheets on you own, but then involve other people, get their feedback as well.

Tara Gentile: Right and the Creative Empire forums are going to be an awesome place for you to do that. Feel free to ask for feedback to find people to partner up with, find an accountability buddy. Really talk out these ideas with other people who are in similar places to you and I think that that could be a really powerful thing for your business.

So as we kind of wrap this first part of the Market Driven Creativity Series up, is there anything else you wanted to say about finding your creative voice, Megan?

Megan Auman: No, I just think that the way to find your creative voice isn't to sit there and stare at the blank computer screen or stare at the blank canvas and think I have to think of my creative voice, I have to think of it, I have to think of it.

Tara Gentile: Right, right.

Megan Auman: Tara, you had a really great quote the other week about getting dirt under your fingernails and I think that's the approach that you and I take to a lot of things. We just do it and I think it always kind of works itself out in the process. So while you guys are waiting for us to release part 2 where we start to get into looking at what the market wants, don't feel like you have to come up with all the answers to what is your creative voice right now.

The best thing you can do is go out there and keep creating and whatever that means to you and kind of build your voice along the way.

Tara Gentile: Amen. So I'm going to go ahead and wrap it up and make sure you download the worksheet just below this post and you'll also find a transcript there as well so you can refer back to this at any time and we'll be coming at you next with a worksheet and seminar on finding out what the market wants and then after that, what the heck you do with it.

So again this has been Megan Auman and Tara Gentile for The Creative Empire and we'll see you right back here the next time. Thanks so much.

Megan Auman: Thanks guys.